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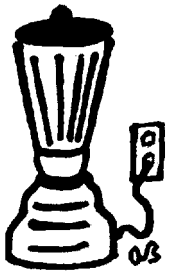
LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

FEBRUARY 21

"LET us do what we know we must do for the salvation of our way of life," Representative Louis Wyman, of New Hampshire, said on the floor of the House on the morning of February 7th. He was moved to this exhortation, he explained, by the extraordinary televised briefing on Cuba staged by the Secretary of Defense the evening before. Mr. Wyman had been greatly impressed by the Defense Department's presentation of its case—but not at all in the way that Mr. McNamara had intended. The point of Mr. McNamara's message was that we ought to keep our shirts on. The point of Mr. Wyman's speech was that we ought to roll up our sleeves and fight. The Secretary's primary mission was to refute Senator Keating's assertion, made in the Senate on January 31st: "There is continuing, absolutely confirmed, and undeniable evidence that the Soviets are maintaining and guarding the medium-range sites they had previously constructed in Cuba. There has been no Soviet move to dismantle these concrete sites or withdraw the launching bases." Mr. Wyman did not say that he was unimpressed by the pictures of the broken-up and bulldozed sites. What alerted him to the danger to our way of life was the fact that there were no pictures of the interiors of the Matanzas caves. This, he said, demonstrated the immediate need for on-site inspection. We must have this, he went on, "not a month from now, but now, within the next few days." He did not use the words "invasion" or "war." Hardly anyone does—except those who counsel against them. What he said was "We must insist on on-sight [*sic*, in the *Congressional Record*] inspection on a continuing basis in Cuba, and if our insistence is met by refusal, we must accomplish such continuing inspection by force if necessary. . . . Such action is the only action consistent with the character, determination, virility, and strength that have made America great. . . . The conclusion is compelled that the Kennedy administration is drifting in this hour of crisis. . . . America needs a refresher course in character."



Mr. Wyman's "next few days" have come and gone, but if this New Hampshire Paul Revere has ridden again, it has not become a matter of public record. What with Lincoln's Birthday and bad weather and a generally slack season in legislation, congressmen were scarce around here last week, and there were several days of undeclared recess on Capitol Hill. Toward the end of the week, however, when the news broke that a new threat to our way of life had been posed by the United Nations Special Fund, which had authorized a six-month experiment in the diversification of Cuban agriculture, things hotted up again. "Mr. Speaker," Representative Paul Rogers, of Florida, said, "this nation's policy goals are beginning to resemble a plate of spaghetti." Spaghetti was his symbol for entanglement, as in the "entangling alliances" that Thomas Jefferson warned against, and Mr. Rogers was complaining that American membership in the U.N. and other consortia was limiting our exercise of sovereignty and making it more difficult for us to get on with our main business, which is "to tear Communism down in Cuba." "Mr. Speaker," said Representative H. R. Gross, of Iowa, "if this sort of thing is to be persisted in, the United Nations should get not another stinking penny . . . for the support of any part of that outfit."

It would have been almost impossible to believe in early November of last year that the respect and admiration the President had won by his handling of the previous month's crisis could have almost completely disappeared by February. Yet this seems to be the case—or close to it—and nothing appears likely to be altered much by this week's White House announcement that some Soviet troops are expected to be pulling out of Cuba within the next few weeks. Whatever the President's standing with the public may be, it affords him little of the kind of political protection, in Congress or out of it, that President Eisenhower enjoyed for nearly eight years, and the fact that so much is being made of Cuba by men who face hard campaigns next year (notably Senator Keating and Senator Stennis, of Mississippi) suggests that these experienced politicians see votes in it. Cuba, it begins to appear, may be to the Kennedy administration what the great stone in Hades was to the wayward Sisyphus. Mr. McNamara made a mighty effort to push it up the hill and into place, but he didn't make it; it rolled right back down on him the next morning, and the Secretary of Defense—up

to that moment the one important member of the administration who had never really tasted defeat is being reviled in Congress and in the press. His is not the only humiliation. Not since 1954, when Secretary of the Army Robert Stevens went to Capitol Hill to negotiate a truce with Senator McCarthy, has there been a spectacle to match last week's pilgrimage of John A. McCone, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, to Senator Keating's office to find out what intelligence the Senator had that the C.I.A. lacked.

In large measure, to be sure, the administration has itself to thank for its troubles. In the 1960 campaign, Mr. Kennedy sounded not very different from Senator Keating on the subject of Cuba. ("We must make clear our intention not to let the Soviet Union turn Cuba into its base in the Caribbean, and our intention to enforce the Monroe Doctrine.") In the whole spectrum of political opinion—from pacifism to jingoism, from non-interventionist purism to out-and-out unilateralism—there has not been a single point of view from which the policy planning of the Bay of Pigs affair could be defended. And while the handling of the October crisis was, of course, superb (an easy *ex-post-facto* judgment, based wholly upon success), the handling of public opinion in the weeks that preceded it was, as things turned out, close to disastrous, and the result of politically inexcusable shortsightedness. In this shortsightedness, Walter Lippmann wrote the other day, lies the explanation of "how Senator Keating won the right to be listened to." It was not that Senator Keating was stating a verifiable fact early last October when he said that ground-to-ground missiles were being moved into Cuba; the impression in the intelligence community here is that his informants had confused the SA-2 installations, or short-range ground-to-air sites, with the launching pads for the longer-range missiles. He was, however, right about Soviet intentions at a time when the administration, with its superior access to the facts of the moment, was incorporating into all its estimates the view that the Soviet Union would never put offensive weapons in Cuba, because, for one thing, it would be such a foolish and dangerous thing to do, and because, for another, history showed that a constant feature of Soviet policy was never to entrust very dangerous weapons to others or, as a recent predecessor of Mr. McNamara's once put it, in speaking about American trade with the Soviet Union, never to

"sell firearms to the Indians." The failure was not really one of intelligence—most people here accept as entirely truthful the official chronology of the verification by aerial reconnaissance in mid-October—but one of intellection. That was bad enough, and it all seemed even worse when, after the war scare, Arthur Sylvester, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, felt called upon to explain that "news flowing from actions taken by the government is part of the weaponry." Mr. Sylvester's famous declaration was altogether gratuitous. Crisis or no crisis, all governments and all politicians always attempt to manage the news in the interests of their policies. But Mr. Sylvester, merely by bringing the matter up when he did, succeeded in planting in people's minds the notion that there had been some quite unusual hanky-panky in October. The rule requiring Pentagon and State Department officials to make known to their departmental press agents the subject matter and the tenor of any talks the officials had with journalists heightened suspicion still further, and the Attorney General's statement in a recent magazine interview that no promise of "air cover" had ever been given the Bay of Pigs invaders suggested the beginning of a campaign to rewrite administration history.

There were very few people prepared to give Mr. McNamara anything like full faith and credit when he appeared on television two weeks ago. The correspondents were skeptical when they were told that the Defense Department would give the general public—that is, the world—information on Cuba that up to a few hours earlier had been kept from it because of "security." The skepticism was quickly enough overcome; it was quickly replaced by annoyance. Mr. McNamara stressed the high cost to the government of this exposure of its intelligence resources; the press withheld sympathy on the ground that whatever reassuring information the Secretary was able to provide could have long since been passed on to the public by responsible journalists, who could have handled the assignment without giving the whole intelligence show away. (The thought has been expressed, in and out of government, that things might have been somewhat different if the New York newspapers—some of which are more favored than any others in the country for leaks of military and diplomatic intelligence—had been publishing.) The war-party politicians immediately spotted the gaps in the Secretary's presentation. The cancels

couldn't penetrate the caves or the covered wharves. They couldn't even penetrate the crates on the outbound ships that were said to be transporting missiles. And no matter what was true or not true about incoming and outgoing missiles, the facts conceded by the administration—the presence in Cuba of Soviet combat troops and tanks and MIG fighters and anti-aircraft rockets and radar stations and motor-torpedo boats—amply demonstrated the "violation" of the Monroe Doctrine, the categorical imperative of American foreign policy that President Kennedy had recklessly pledged himself to "enforce," as if it were a provision of the Railroad Retirement Act.

In its television report, the Defense Department made an impressive display of how much it knew about Cuba and—this is probably what it was least eager to reveal—how much it had been able to learn about Soviet ships once they had left Baltic and Black Sea ports. The very display of knowledge, though, raised some awkward questions. At the onset of the October crisis, correspondents covering the Pentagon were taken by surprise when the Secretary informed them that Russian intermediate-range missiles could strike out twenty-two hundred miles from Cuba and hit just about every American city except Seattle. The correspondents had never before been told that the Soviets had IRBMs of that range; previous estimates had been about twelve hundred miles. When they raised the question, they were told that the new estimate was based on new "intelligence." When they asked whether any of these big weapons had been spotted in Cuba, they were told that U-2s had come back with pictures of IRBM launching sites. Between October 22nd and February 6th, the Pentagon declined to answer questions about Soviet IRBMs, in or out of Cuba. When the McNamara briefing was announced, the correspondents thought that some light would be cast on this matter. There was no light cast at all, and as things stand today there is no shred of evidence that Soviet IRBMs ever got to Cuba, were ever sent toward Cuba, or ever had the reach ascribed to them. Mr. McNamara said only that he had pictures of Soviet IRBMs "taken elsewhere." They would presumably have been in Red Square, and if the photographs were not taken by Americans with cameras in their belt buckles, they must have been [illegible] Soviet pictures. He said, too, that Soviet ships outbound from Cuba in late October "very probably carried IRBM mis-

siles and or associated equipment." Commenting in the current *New Republic* on this particular gap in the Secretary's presentation, Warren Rogers, who in happier times reports from the Pentagon to the *Herald Tribune*, says, "This is vexing, since it was the IRBM threat, dramatized by Pentagon maps showing that they could reach from Havana to almost any city in the United States and half of South America, that rallied the American people and Latin America behind the President in his showdown with Soviet Premier Khrushchev last October."

THE President two days ago advised the Congressional leaders that he has it on the highest authority that Russian troops by the thousand will soon be leaving Cuba. Troopships are said to have been observed moving toward the Caribbean. The legislators, for the most part, have said that they are from Missouri and will sleep uneasily until they have certain knowledge that every last Russian has departed. Complete withdrawal is what the administration says it will press for, and probably it will be forced to do so in order to satisfy political needs here. There is large doubt, however, as to whether a complete, or even a near-complete, withdrawal of the Russian forces is really in the national interest. They would presumably leave behind them the ground-to-air rocket installations and the MIGs that are capable of preventing or severely hampering our aerial reconnaissance missions. It is not certain that in Cuban hands these would be put to immediate use; what *is* certain is that in Soviet hands they have not been used. MIGs have now and then moved in fairly close on our low-flying reconnaissance aircraft, but since the missile crisis was brought to an end, on October 28th, no attempts have been made to shoot them down, and it is reported that we have taped the voices of airborne Russian commanders instructing all other pilots to refrain from firing on the American spy planes under any circumstances. It has been suggested that although the Russians may be leading from fear and weakness at the moment, if we permit them to remain in Cuba and fortify the island, the day will come when an American invasion will no longer be militarily feasible—our reconnaissance planes could be brought down like so many wild geese, allowing missiles of any sort to be reintroduced without our knowing much about it. The administration tends to make rather light of this. The cost of invasion,

it says, is not to be reckoned simply in terms of getting beyond the island's coastal defenses and subduing Castro's troops and whatever Russian troops may be encountered. After all, we have a quite formidable military presence in Cuba ourselves, and a great deal of air and sea power close at hand. The really staggering cost would be that of occupation. Guerrilla warfare could go on for years after the last Russian armor had been destroyed, and the cost in diplomatic and political terms would be enormous, quite apart from the military cost. From the point of view of our over-all policy in Latin America and in the rest of the world, the present occupation of Cuba by Russian troops is not entirely a bad thing. The destruction of Castro and Communism by an American occupation would increase sympathy, and perhaps support, for both in other parts of the world; the presence in Cuba today of Soviet troops can only diminish Castro's personal prestige as a revolutionary leader and the appeal of Communism as an expression of self-determination. Moreover, a highly vulnerable Soviet military base in the Western Hemisphere gives us a kind of Soviet hostage—one roughly comparable in numbers and vulnerability to the Allied forces in West Berlin, which the Russians often speak of as a hostage.

The administration will, of course, put all the pressure it can on the Soviet Union for the withdrawal of troops and for further assurances on the withdrawal of weapons. It dare not leave itself open to the accusation that it values the Monroe Doctrine less highly than its critics do. The clamor is unlikely to be stilled, however, for the only way of ever "proving" that the critics' terms had been met would be through some kind of on-site inspection by a bipartisan Congressional team led by Senators Keating and Stennis. And if the country were to have the Senators' word for it that the caves contained no missiles, and that not a single Russian or Czech or Pole could be found in all of Cuba, there would remain the problem of proving that the missiles and the troops were back in the Soviet Union, and not in some other Latin-American country. (It has already been suggested in testimony before a House committee that the threat has merely been removed from Cuba to Paraguay.) A good deal of the current clamor over the threat of Russian troops and Russian arms in this hemisphere is simply a new flowering of isolationism. In the late forties and early fifties, when a global policy was in the making, opponents of the policy held that the one Communist